EMPLOYERS CAN EXPECT EMPLOYEES TO ASK, "WHY WASN'T I OFFERED THAT TRAINING OPPORTUNITY?"

THE CHANGING WORKPLACE AND WORKFORCE

BY ROSEMARY J. ERICKSON

The major issues of the '80s are likely to be: increased regulation; industrial centralization; being technologically surpassed; the workplace; women; the economy; research and development; the individual; privacy and rights; intellectual life; and the American conscience.

These are outlined in a booklet entitled, "Some Issues in America in the early 1980s," as part of Western Behavioral Sciences Institute's planning for the 1980s. For that, I conducted a social trend analysis over the past several months, which included monitoring and analyzing major newspapers, news magazines, and over 5,000 social science journals, and interviewing people locally, in New York, and in some 25 agencies in Washington, D.C.

Work force issues recently have focused on the continuing need to hire and promote women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Eli Ginzberg (1978) explains just how much this pressure is expected to increase in the future. He has this to say: "I believe no court can stop or even significantly slow the drive to eliminate all forms of discrimination in employment. In fact, there probably will be an acceleration of pressures to push ahead — pressure from self-interested groups whose consciousnesses have been raised, from a bureaucracy committed to broadening opportunities, and especially from the steadily increasing numbers of educated blacks and women who are ready and eager to compete for the better jobs." (p. 26)

Where does the rub come in? Ginsberg continues: "Changes in the hard core of the labor force — white males — are also occurring rapidly. The tremendous increase in the numbers of young white workers has abated. The curve will show a bulge soon in the 25 to 34 age group, and somewhat later in the 35 to 44 bracket. Consequently, in the next decade or two there will be severe crowding in the lower ranks of management. Not only will there be acute competition among white males, but also growing numbers of blacks and women will be added to the pool of competitors." (p. 26)

Labor arbitrators, lawyers, and judges are becoming increasingly aware of the profound legal, sociological, and economic changes taking place in our work force, and the increasing realization that equal treatment in all aspects of employment must be the keystone of our society (Rosenberg, 1979).

Competition is keen in the work force today. For the first time, over 50 per cent of American women work outside the home, so the typical woman is no longer a housewife. The number of women managers increased from 22.3 per cent in 1977 to 23.4 per cent in 1978. The number of blacks who are in the professions increased from 4.8 per cent to 11.7 per cent between 1960 and 1976, compared with an increase of 12.1 per cent to 15.7 per cent for whites. The work force is increasingly educated. In 1940, only one in 22 workers were college graduates. Today they are one in four. Since Congress decreed that employers cannot force their workers to retire before they

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reach the age of 70, there will be changes in the age distribution of workers. It was, in fact, this amendment to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act that was apparently the ultimate issue that brought Sears to file its suit against 10 federal agencies claiming conflicting regulations — that is if people cannot be retired, it further tightened the job market for women and minorities. Also with the baby boom bulge already in the work force the bulge will be advancing in age. (Incidentally, this has tremendous implications for marketing, too — the "youth" appeal is expected to diminish as a greater proportion of the population becomes older.)

Competition will be intense in the upcoming years not only because of the sheer demographics and involvement of women and minorities, but also because of another phenomenon — the professionalization of the U.S. labor force (Ginzberg, 1979). Many workers are educated and trained for six or seven years beyond high school, so they have had to learn to think critically. They do not automatically accept the values, goals, and patterns of behavior in the society around them or of the companies in which they work. Clearly this kind of judgment narrows the discretion of top management in the public agencies and business organizations in which they are employed. A hierarchical, authoritative management is probably incongruous with such a work force.

The Population Survey for 1977 (Ginzberg, 1979) shows professional and technical workers to be up by 97 per cent in a single generation (that is from 1958). These include the professions of law, medicine, professors, writers, artists, entertainers, teachers, counselors, librarians, and other helping professionals, engineers, accountants and the new professions. The new professions are the outgrowths of postwar developments in technology — and include computer specialists, operations and systems analysts, lawyers, auditors, and others serving large businesses in personnel and labor relations, social science, research, etc. In addition, and what we are talking about here, is fairness and competition in the labor force, and how in the future it can be expected to have much less to do with hiring, and much more to do with promoting.

The slope of the trend to professional management is plainly steep, with a swell of U.S. managers and administrators in the last 20 years increasing by 110 per cent. In short, there are more educated people of all races and both sexes who are qualified to compete for top-level jobs than ever before in our history, or in the history of any society.

If the projections in demography and professionalization are correct, the training design environment can expect heightened pressure for training opportunities that contribute to a manager's promotability and also to personal job satisfaction — employees will ask a question such as, "Why wasn't I offered that training opportunity?"

It can be expected that training decisions will be viewed as being of increased importance due to the increased competition for promotion from women and minorities. Selection for training has been determined by the courts to be an employment decision (Ginzberg, 1979; Gordon, 1978; Maslow, 1976; Schneier, 1978). As such, it falls within the laws and regulations regarding adverse impact on protected groups. In a context of intense competition, training decisions will face greater risk of legal challenges. The issue of training and its importance in the future

can only be mentioned today as a way of putting you on alert that the training and development decisions of the future will be as important as the hiring and selection decisions of the past and present.

Along with these trends is an important change in values and attitudes among the work force. These were reported in the *Harvard Business Review* recently where employee attitude surveys over a 25-year period were examined. It was reported that employees perceived that their *basic needs* for adequate pay and working conditions are being fulfilled to the extent that they are now replaced with concerns for esteem-related factors such as advancement opportunity, equity, respect, and companies' responsiveness to employees' problems.

This fits well with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with five levels: the lowest are physiological needs or bodily needs; followed by safety needs; social needs; ego needs (self-esteem and confidence); and need for self-actualization (creativity and fulfillment) (Miner & Miner, 1973). As one level of need in the hierarchy is satisfied, these needs will no longer be as of great a concern, and the person moves up to the next level. What employees appear to be saying, in general, is that their basic needs of pay or security are relatively well taken care of; therefore, they have moved to needs such as social and ego and even self-actualization. This is what is being expressed when they ask for more advancement, training opportunities, greater equality, more respect from supervisors, and greater responsiveness from their companies.

The work force is also more informed today than ever before. They are aware of their needs and aware of their rights, Affirmative Action requirements, and the company's responsibility to them as workers.

Changing Employee Values

Although there is no doubt that management practices and personnel policies have been evolving, advancing, and improving, it appears that employees' values and their sets of expectations have been evolving at an even faster pace. Evidently, companies will have to speed up their pace if they are to keep up with employees' changing values. It has been speculated that these changing attitudes in the work force represent the following shift, according to Cooper, Morgan, Foley, and Kaplan (1979): "The 1960s were characterized by increasing demands for as well as tolerance of self-expression, self-fulfillment, and personal growth — everywhere but in industry. These demands are really just beginning to be voiced in industry, where employees at all levels, many of whom are recent graduates, now feel that they too are entitled to experience some intrinsic satisfaction from their work." (p. 124)

A nationwide poll last year indicated that job dissatisfaction in America had increased from 1973 to the present. One expert suggests, however, that this may reflect dissatisfaction with the quality of life and a general social mood, rather than with the quality of the workplace (Labor Letter, June 1979).

In any event, the crucial issue becomes the degree to which management can sharpen its decision-making skills to successfully identify, anticipate, and address changing values in their own organizations. "But make no mistake about it," Cooper et al. (1979) goes on, "these value changes will be the *realities* that companies must face in the 1980s"

One move that companies will no doubt make will be for greater responsibility toward the worker. It is worth their while to provide certain services for employees to improve morale. This relates to health, mental health, alcoholism, boredom and all such job-related problems. And there are many improvements or changes that can be made. There is nothing magical, for example, about the number "40" — as in 40-hour workweek. The workweek could be shorter. In some cases, people are trying out job-sharing, which helps unemployment and working mothers — and is where two people split the

responsibilities of one job. This can be done at management levels, not just on the assembly line. Flexitime is gradually being introduced in more companies. There is also the idea of having people work on the total product and using teamwork on assembly lines. In addition, personal career development for individuals and preretirement planning are being introduced in some larger companies. To provide more high-level positions, companies may have to become more lateral than hierarchical. A lot of creative thought and effort will need to be given in this upcoming decade to find the "solutions" — particularly when the problems (or challenges) continue to change.

An economist (Jules Backman, 1979) underlines the change we are experiencing by pointing out that "overall, while unemployment will lessen in the next decade, employee unrest will probably increase because of the effects of the demographic changes in the work force. An increasing number of older workers, limited opportunities for promotion, more pressure for Affirmative Action, and the demand for part-time, flexible working schedules will combine to intensify labor dissatisfaction." It remains to be seen whether these demands can be met without undercutting the risk-taking, profit-seeking, efficiency criteria which has been the American businessman's tradition.

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